THE HUMBLE PETITION OF

Many thousands, Gentlemen, Free-holders, and others, of the County of WORCESTER,

To the Parliament of the Common-wealth of ENGLAND.

In behalf of the Able, Faithful, Godly Ministry of this NATION.

Delivered by Colonel *John Bridges*, and Mr. *Thomas Foly*, *December* 22. 1652.

With the Parliaments Answer thereunto.

LONDON,

Printed by *Robert White*, for *Francis Tyton*, and *Thomas Underhill*, and are to be sold at their Shops, the three Daggers in *Fleetstreet*,

To the Honourable the Parliament of the Common-wealth of *ENGLAND*.

The Humble Petition of us Gentlemen, Free-holders, and others inhabiting the County of Worceſter.

SHEVVETH,

THAT your Petitioners having with grief obſerved both the Language of many Pamphlets and perſons of late times, againſt the Miniſters of Chriſt among us, and Petitions preferred to you againſt their preſent maintenance, without any regard to the ſubſtitution of a fitter: and theſe pretending to the relief of the impoveriſhed Nation, as if they were the very ſenſe and language of the body of this Commonwealth: We cannot but ſuſpect, yea diſcern that there is a party that deſire and endeavour the ſubverſion of the Miniſtrie; yet have we hitherto remained ſilent, partly in hopes that they were ſo few and inconſiderable, as not to deſerve to be publikely taken notice of, and mentioned, to the diſhonour of our Nation: partly that we might not interrupt your weighty conſultations, but chiefly leſt we ſhould be miſ-interpreted to ſuſpect your fidelitie to the Miniſtrie, and conſequently to Chriſtianity and Chriſt himſelf: which we know you muſt needs reſent as an uncharitable cenſoriouſneſs, conſidering how evident you have ſeen, and how often acknowledged with greateſt ſolemnity, the Lord Jeſus in your preſervations; and how deeply you are engaged to him above moſt men on earth, and how ſenſibly you vindicated a perſecuted Miniſtrie in the very beginning of this Parliament, and how ſtrongly you have obliged your ſelves, not only to preſerve the Reformed Religion in Doctrine, Worſhip, Diſcipline, and Government; but alſo to promote in all theſe a further reformation where it is wanting; as alſo conſidering what a tender reſpect to a faithful Miniſtrie you have all along to this day profeſſed, and are ſtill conſulting for the Propagation of the Goſpel, and have done Juſtice on ſome oppoſers ſo near you; beſides the augmentations you have allow-

ed to many places where means was wanting. We diſclaim therefore all ſuch ungrateful cenſoriouſneſs, and thankfully acknowledge all your favors to the Miniſtrie and Goſpel of the Lord Jeſus, who is eaſily able to reward you, and ſee that you be no loſers by him and his Cauſe. But yet leaſt our continued ſilence ſhould ſeem to ſignifie our conſent to thoſe that would undo us, under pretence of releiving us; and leſt they be thought to ſpeak our ſenſe, leſt their audaciouſneſs encreaſe while none contradict them; and leſt we diſhonour our Nation in the eyes of the Chriſtian world, whileſt they think that the voice of theſe few is the common voice; and leſt your own hearts ſhould be overwhelmed with grief, not only to ſee ſuch a degenerated people living under your Government; but alſo that ſo few gain-ſay them, as if the Nation had loſt their love to the Goſpel: and that after ſuch light, profeſſion and engagements; and conſequently you may think they will prove an ungrateful people to you, who prove ſo ungrateful to the Lord their Saviour; We have therefore adventured on this bold enterpellation, and crave your patience, while we do with more then ordinary importunity beſpeak you, ſeeing it is in the zeal of the Lord, for his glory, his Church, his Goſpel, and the ſouls of our ſelves and poſterity. We know it was by Miniſters of the Goſpel, that the Lord Jeſus did ſet up his Kingdom on earth, and hath ſubdued ſo much of the World to himſelf, deſtroying the Kingdom of Darkneſs, Paganiſm, Idolatry, and wickedneſs: we know he granted their Commiſſion upon the reception of his plenipotencie, and upon his aſcending he gave them for the perfecting of the Saints, and the edifying of his body, till they come to his fulneſs, and that as a means to preſerve them from Seducers, and being toſſed and carryed about as children with every wind of Doctrine, *Eph.*4 9. to 15. and hath promiſed to be with them to the end of the world: which promiſe he hath hitherto eminently accompliſhed. It is the Miniſtrie by which Chriſt hath continued his Church to this day: nor do we know, or have heard of that place on earth where Chriſtianity was ever maintained in ſplendor and vigor (if at all continued) without a Miniſtrie. It was the Miniſters by whom Chriſt did waken the ſuperſtitious world, and diſcover to them the Romiſh deluſions; and by whom he begun and carryed on the Work of Reformation, by them exciting a zealous Magiſtracie; and after all their labours, multitudes of them did ſacrifice their lives in the flames. It is the writings of a learned able Miniſtrie which yet ſtand up in the face of Heatheniſh, Mahometan, and Romiſh adverſaries, to their vexation and confuſion, which they may ſooner reproach or burn, then anſwer: by which after-ages are, and ſtill may be ſtabliſhed in the truth, againſt all the ſubtill endeavours of Seducers. It is a learned, able, faithful Miniſtrie, which yet for the daunting and diſcouragement of the Jeſuits and other deceivers,

who well know, if theſe were but taken out of their way, how boldly they might dare us, how inſultingly they might challenge us to diſpute for our Religion, and how eaſily they might ſilence and ſhame us, and thereby carry away the multitude after them. For who ſhould ſtrengthen the Peoples hearts, and defend the Cauſe of the LORD againſt them, if ſuch a Miniſtry were down? It was a faithfull Miniſtry who revealed Gods Mercy, and the precious Truths of the Goſpel to our own ſouls, and whom God by the Cooperation of his Spirit hath bleſſed to be the means of converting, or confirming, or both, the ſouls of all thoſe of us who have attained to any ſaving knowledge of himſelf. When we remember how often, and how happily our ſouls have been revived and refreſhed by their Miniſtry, we are aſhamed of the remiſneſs of our Zeal in this Cauſe; when we think that they are our Fathers, and confirmers in *Chriſt*, and how they muſt preſent us to him at his appearing as their Joy and Crown, *Phil.* 2.19,20. and that when we have eſcaped the flames of Hell, and meet them in glory, we muſt acknowledge them Inſtruments of ſo unvaluable a bleſſing; we had rather there were no tongues in our mouths, then that ever we ſhould joyn with their reproachers, and had rather ſuffer greater wants then ever we yet ſuffered, then ungratefully deny them their neceſſary maintenance, ſeeing our Lord himſelf ſaid, when he ſet them upon his Work, *The Labourer is worthy of his hire*; and the Holy Ghoſt ſaith, *Who goeth to warfare at his own charge? They that miniſter about holy things, live of the things of the Temple; even ſo hath the Lord ordained, that they which preach the Goſpel, ſhould live of the Goſpel*, 1 *Cor.* 9.7. to 15. Conſidering alſo that they are not Forreigners, but *Engliſhmen*, our own Brethren, and Sons that receive it from us, even that which by Law is not ours but theirs; and conſidering alſo how much more liberal Papiſts are to their Maſs-Prieſts and ſeducing Jeſuits then we are to a faithfull Miniſtry of Chriſt. And when we conſider, that if *England* do excell other Nations in the light of knowledge, and power of Godlineſs, it is the Miniſtry that are herein our glory, and the means of what the People do enjoy, we cannot be ſo ungratefull to them as to ſtarve them and caſt them off; nor yet ſuch enemies to *Englands* happineſs and honour: yea, when we conſider how the dreadfull, omnipotent King of Saints doth call them his Co-workers, and hath ſent them in ſubſerviency to his own blood-ſhed, and Spirit, and ſaid, *He that deſpiſeth you, deſpiſeth me*; we had rather endure any corporal calamities, then ſtand charged with ſuch a ſin at the Bar of our Lord: Yea, and when we conſider how he hath owned and ſtood by them, and rebuked Kings for their ſakes and his Churches, charging them to do his Prophets no harm; and how well thoſe Rulers have ſped, that have moſt obeyed, and encouraged them in the Work of th

Lord, and how God hath broken those powers that have disobeyed and abused them, 2 *Chron.* 36. 15, 16, 17. and how severely he hath dealt in *England* before our eyes with that generation of men that silenced, reproached, and persecuted them; we tremble at Gods Judgements, and dare not venter into the same consuming fire, whose flames are yet so fresh in our memory.

Your Petitioners having as in the presence of the Lord made this necessary and solemn profession of their Judgements, Affections, and Resolutions, to acquaint you how far they are from approving or consenting to any opposers or underminers of the Ministry and Gospel of the Lord *Jesus*, do humbly address themselves, with these earnest requests, to this Honourable Assembly.

First, That you will be pleased, not only to continue your owning of, and tenderest care for the upholding of an Able, Godly, Faithfull Ministry (of which we dare not doubt) but also that you will so far countenance and encourage them in the Lords Work, and discountenance all that oppose them, directly or indirectly, that all the World, and especially the People of this Common-wealth, may still see, and acknowledge your open and resolved adhering to the Reformed Christian Religion, and Interest of the Lord Jesus: and seeing all the ungodly (besides misguided distempered Christians) are ever discouragers of them, God having sent them on a Work so unpleasing to flesh and blood, you will the more sedulously encourage them, as nursing Fathers of the Church.

Secondly, that you will be pleased to this end, to take special care of their competent maintenance, that we may not have an ignorant Ministry, while they are forced to be labouring for food and raiment, while they should be in their studies, or watching over their flocks; and that through disability or unpreparedness, they disgrace not the work of Christ, nor make it and their office contemptible, thereby rejoycing the enemy, and hindring the saving of souls; specially seeing it is expected that they credit their Doctrine with works of Charity: And seeing that a dependant and beggarly Ministry will lose so much of their Authority with the souls that most need them, and themselves will be laid open to the sore temptation of Man-pleasing; besides the probability of the suffering of their children, when they are dead: And if the Ministers of this Age be never so resolved to continue their work through all necessities, yet in the next Age the Church is like to be destitute and desolate, because men will set their sons to other studies and imployments: We therefore humbly crave, that this Honorable Assembly will not take down the present Maintenance by Tythes (though we have as much reason to be sensible of those inconveniences that it is charged with,

as others) or at leaſt, not till they, inſtead of it, eſtabliſh as ſure, and full, and fit a Maintenance.

Thirdly, That you will be pleaſed to take into your compaſſionate thoughts, both the dark places in *England* and *Wales* which want able godly Teachers; and the ſtate of great Cities, and populous Towns, where through the exceeding number of ſouls, one Miniſter hath more work then can poſſibly be done by many: whereby while they are confined to the publike work alone, all private Miniſterial Inſtruction, Admonition, and other overſight, muſt needs be neglected: That therefore to ſuch very numerous Congregations, you would allow a maintenance, if not to Miniſters proportionable to the number of ſouls, and greatneſs of the work; yet at leaſt more then in ſmaller places: We offer but the ſame requeſt to you, in your places, which Chriſt hath commanded us to offer to God himſelf, That where the harveſt is great, and the Labourers are few, more Labourers may be ſent into the harveſt.

Fourthly, That you will be pleaſed to continue your care of the Univerſities, and Schools of Learning, and tenderly preſerve their maintenance and neceſſary privileges, that there may be a meet ſupply of Labourers for the continuation of the Goſpel, and the glory of *England* to our Poſterity.

Fifthly, And becauſe our ſad diviſions in matter of Religion, eſpecially about Church-Government, have been ſuch a hinderance to the propagation of the Goſpel, that you will be pleaſed ſpeedily to imploy your utmoſt wiſdom and power for the healing of them: And to that end would call together ſome of the moſt godly, prudent, peaceable Divines of each party, that differs in points of Church-Government, and lay upon them your Commands and Adjuration, that they ceaſe not amicable conſulting and ſeeking God, till they have found out a meet way for accommodation and unity, and acquainted you therewith: And if through Gods heavy diſpleaſure againſt us, he ſhall ſuffer the ſpirit of diviſion and prejudice ſo far to prevail, as to fruſtrate their conſultations (the contrary whereto we ſhould ſtrongly hope) that you would be pleaſed to adviſe with thoſe Divines that are moſt judicious and peaceable, and leaſt addicted to parties; and thereupon to recommend at leaſt to the people, ſo much of Church-Order and Government, as you finde to be clearly required by Jeſus Chriſt, and vouchſafe it your publique Countenance and Encouragement, though you ſcruple an enforcement.

These things we humbly and earnestly requist of this Honorable Assembly, in the behalf of Jesus Christ (to whom we doubt not but you are daily Petitioners) and of this Commonwealth, and the souls of men: beseeching you to let the interest of the Gospel have the speedy and resolute dispatch in your consultations, and at least to equal it with our most necessary defence, whereby you will the more engage Christ to defend both you and us, whom you have so often found to be the surest defence: So shall you be called The Repairers of our Breaches; *And shall oblige us to pray, &c.*

[Subscribed by above Six thousand.]

COl. *John Bridges*, and Mr. *Thomas Foly* being called in to the House, Master Speaker told them, the House had read and considered the Petition brought up out of the County of *Worcester*, and the House had commanded him to give them thanks on the behalf of those of the County of *Worcester* that sent it, for their good affections expressed therein: And accordingly he did give them the thanks of the House, and that they would take their Petition into serious consideration in due time.

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